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ABSTRACT

Teacher education students surveyed about their perceptions of child advocacy indicated that to become successful advocates they needed to become more self-confident and politically aware and to be able to communicate effectively with knowledge of current issues, advocacy methods, and the political system. In order to facilitate the training of early childhood educators in one technique of effective advocacy, this paper offers a framework for analyzing child advocacy/early education issues and provides guidelines for developing debate arguments. Contents answer the following questions: (1) What is an issue? (2) How can questions underlying a debate issue be formulated? (3) How can plausible arguments be developed? (4) How can teams prepare for an informal debate? (5) What is the format of the informal debate? (6) What strategies are helpful during delivery of a debate? The debate process outlined in the paper is provided to encourage students to "find their own answers" to current issues and to incorporate advocacy training into teacher education. (RH)

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Preparing Early Childhood Teachers To Become Advocates

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Preparing Early Childhood Teachers to Become Advocates:

A New Challenge for Teacher Education

Mary A. Jensen

State University of New York - Geneseo

Paper presented at the 1986 National Association for the Education of Young Children Conference, Washington, DC, November 15, 1986

Preparing Early Childhood Teachers to Become Advocates:
A New Challenge for Teacher Education

Teacher Educators as Advocates: Do We Offer Education That Serves the Best Interests of Our Students Today?

One common characteristic observed in prospective early childhood teachers is their warm delight in young children. This concern for and enjoyment of children often has been part of their decision to pursue early education studies at a time when teachers' salaries, benefits, and working conditions have not kept pace with those of elementary school teachers (e.g. 1.5% vs. 6.6% annual salary increase in Pennsylvania). As Whitebook and Almy (1986) report 70% of those caring for children earn wages below the poverty level. In Michigan, average salaries earned by child care staff with baccalaureate degrees are based on a $5.66 hourly rate. In contrast, public school teachers with baccalaureate degrees earn salaries that represent a $9.98 - $18.09 hourly rate. (Almy, 1985). Therefore, today, early childhood professionals may well need to extend their concerns for the child beyond classroom walls and their immediate interactions with children. Efforts by early childhood professionals to advocate for quality programs and services for young children have expanded somewhat in recent years (Lombardi, 1986), but child advocacy today must include advocacy for personnel who work with children as well as for children and their families if we are to have quality staff and programs for young children.

What is Child Advocacy?

Kahn, Kamerman, and McGowan (1972) define child advocacy as "intervention on behalf of children into or with those services and institutions that serve children or impinge on their lives." (p. 117) Child advocacy's focus is on increasing the responsiveness and relevance of secondary institutions and services such as schools, juvenile courts, health programs, and child welfare

programs. Child advocacy's activities include both case advocacy (assuring needed service to families or individuals) and class advocacy (changing procedures, personnel, laws, etc., that affect categories or groups of families and children). Child advocacy rests on the assumption that children lack control over their fate and are essentially powerless in achieving access to societal resources, and therefore adults should work actively to see that children's rights are assured and that children obtain the resources necessary to meet their development needs (Melton, 1983).

What is the Need for Child Advocacy Today?

In the past fifteen years, the early childhood profession has become increasingly aware of the need to advocate publicly for children and families. Economic changes within our society, less stable communities, and shifts in family makeup have tended to isolate families and to put additional strains on the family unit. Thus, child advocacy is particularly important today in providing or bolstering support systems that help the child to cope with emotional needs as well as to learn information-processing strategies (Melton, 1983). Unfortunately, recent legislation affecting children often has been met by cutbacks, vetoes, anti-family attacks, and bureaucratic red tape (Children's Defense Fund, 1985; Forgione, 1980; Zigler & Finn, 1981). Simultaneously, however, state ECE legislative activity has increased dramatically (Forgione, 1980), and the news media and popular press have been giving more coverage to child care and child advocacy issues. It is important today that we, as professionals, take an active advocacy stance and make an informed, public response to these issues, if we wish to positively influence public opinion and if child care is to be adequately funded by the public. Early childhood professional organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children and its state affiliates have expanded their involvement

in such efforts (Whitebook & Almy, 1986). More teacher education programs, however, need to foster advocacy dispositions in their students (Almy, 1985).

What is the Need for Advocacy Training in Early Childhood Teacher Education?

If future teachers are going to be prepared for the realities of today, then the necessity for advocacy, not only for children and families but also for themselves as professionals, must be realized (Hostetler, 1981). In 1972, however, Kahn, Kamerman, and McGowan warned our profession that a "call" to advocate does not make one correct and the accountability of advocates representing a professional group may become a problem. Even today, this warning seems premature, but it does suggest a need for training if widespread advocacy is to be effective. Moreover, Sponseller and Fink (1982) conclude that one of the reasons discussion of children's problems seldom results in effective action or legislation is the political naivete of child advocates, many of whom have only recently committed themselves to action. As a first step in adding this dimension to existing teacher education programs, Almy (1985) suggests that we as teacher educators should act as models for the advocacy role. We should demonstrate to our students that we are informed about current child care issues, can collaborate effectively with colleagues, parents and other professionals, and advocate actively for child care issues. Our students are more likely to become advocates if we model positive advocacy behaviors for them.

What are the Self-Reported Needs of Prospective Early Childhood Teachers in Relation to Advocacy Training?

A recent survey of 15 teacher education students enrolled in an early childhood issues course provided insights into their perceptions of child advocacy. The students were surveyed using an open-ended, anonymous questionnaire (See Appendix A). For the six questions, the data were analyzed for major categories or patterns of response (See Table 1). When asked why they would

become involved in child advocacy, most (10) students indicated a concern for children and children's needs. A secondary reason for involvement was a sense of professional obligation (7). Considering on the other hand, why they might be reluctant to become involved, most students (9) anticipated that their efforts would be ineffective and some (6) felt involvement would be time-consuming. But by far, the hurdle perceived as most difficult to overcome was establishing feelings of self-assurance and being taken seriously (10). These reasons for lack of involvement are consistent with those found by Lombardi (1986) for a group of graduate students. When asked how they would need to change to become a successful advocate, most students in the present study (10) indicated that they needed to become more self-confident and determined, and some (7) felt they needed to become more politically aware. When asked what they would need to be able to do, the overwhelming response was communicate effectively (13). And when asked what they would need to know, responses split between knowledge of current issues (7), knowledge of advocacy methods (6), and knowledge of the political system (5). One of the implications of these results for teacher educators is that we should think of advocacy training as more than one activity or strategy, because there are affective as well as skill and knowledge dimensions to advocacy training and different types and levels of child advocacy need to be addressed. Moreover, an ecological model might be best suited to advocacy training, because it teaches advocates to look beyond the immediate situation and problem and to consider various interacting forces in the social and political system (Melton, 1983).

Strategies to Prepare Teachers for Advocacy

Suggestions for developing prospective teachers knowledge of current child advocacy issues and strategies as well as strengthening their dispositions

to assume advocacy roles come from several sources (Allen, 1983; Deloria & Brookins, 1982; Fink & Sponseller, 1977; Jensen, 1985; Kilmer, 1980; New York State Child Care Coordinating Council, n.d.; Whitebook & Ginsburg, 1984; Zigler & Finn, 1981). These suggestions can be grouped in the following categories:

A. Issue Debates

B. Issue Interviews and Advocacy Speakers

C. Role-Play Simulation Exercises

D. Advocacy Journals, Public Information Displays and Media Materials, Advocacy Letters, Position Papers, and Testimony

E. Professional Organizations, Lobbying Coalitions, and Task Forces

The remainder of this paper will focus on one of the above strategies and a process developed within an existing teacher education program for investigation and debate of current child care issues. Beyond developing knowledge of current child care issues and debate/presentation skills, this process aims at strengthening students' dispositions to assume advocacy roles (Katz, 1977). Although no substitute for action, this process prepares students to take the further steps of planning strategies and taking concrete actions to improve conditions for children, families, and child care professionals in our society (Sponseller & Fink, 1982).

A Framework for Analyzing Child Advocacy/Early Education Issues

To assist students in selecting a debate problem and formulating debate questions, a collection of selected readings on current issues was developed (Jensen & Chevalier, 1983) and the following framework for analyzing issues and information about developing debate arguments is provided. (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1

FRAMEWORK FOR IDENTIFYING AND ANALYZING CHILD ADVOCACY/EARLY EDUCATION ISSUES

What Are Significant And Real Issues in Early Childhood Education Today?	Which Of The Following Ways Of Addressing This Issue Is/Are Most Pressing Or Most Critical?	In The Process Of Selecting An Advocacy Issue, Identify:	What Strategies And Evidence Will You Use To Justify Or Clarify Your Position On This Issue?
	1. Definition Questions: What is the meaning of a word, phrase, or problem?	1. The significance of the issue for early education and our changing society	1. Elaborating terms or making distinctions
	2. Verification Questions: What is the true state of affairs or how does the world operate?	2. The opposing positions and their alternative proposals for action	2. Citing authoritative (expert) definitions or opinions
	3. Prescription (Value) Questions: What should or should not be done?	3. The views of the nature of childhood assumed by or implicit in the opposing positions.	3. Describing observational/ clinical evidence: (a) personal experience, (b) others' anecdotes, or (c) case studies
		4. The possible delimitations, disclaimers, or constraints claimed by the opposing positions in dealing with the issue	4. Describing and evaluating empirical evidence: (a) research studies [reliable, valid, and representative] or (b) evaluation studies
		5. The possible and/or real consequences of each position or course of action	5. Using an analogy or comparable situation
			6. Calling for logical reasoning or common sense

What is an issue?

An issue is a point of genuine dispute that entails the desire for change on the part of some persons. When early education issues arise, underlying problems or questions are confronted in order to improve or protect the welfare of children, families, or staff in early education.

Selection of an issue for debate should rest on the belief that the issue is a genuine dilemma for the field of early education. In other words, both sides of the issue to be debated can present plausible arguments and some sound evidence.

Examples of issues selected by teacher education students for debate are:

1. Is television viewing at home or in a day care center detrimental to children?
2. Are family day care homes better places for young children than are day care centers?
3. Are laws and programs for bilingual/multicultural education effective?
4. Is infant education and stimulation provided in day care centers as beneficial to infants as home care by a parent?
5. Is formal parent education helpful to becoming an effective parent?

How can questions underlying a debate issue be formulated?

In order to develop questions to investigate and pose for the debate, the main issue can be broken down into definition issues, verification issues, and prescription issues (Oliver & Newmann, 1969; Taylor, 1961). A definition issue poses a question about the meaning of a key concept, phrase, or problem. A verification issue poses a question about the true state of affairs or how the world operates. A prescription issue poses a question about actions that should or should not be taken.

Examples of definition, verification, and prescription issues for a debate are:

1. What is bilingual/multicultural education? (definition)
2. What is child abuse? (definition)
3. How does nutrition affect children's appearance and behavior? (verification)
4. Is group care detrimental for infants and toddlers? (verification)
5. Should preschool teachers encourage children's exploration of non-traditional sex roles in play? (prescription)
6. Should an abused child generally be taken out of the home? (prescription)

If we must limit the number of questions we address for the sake of clarity in our arguments, we should consider which questions are either most pressing or most significant for the welfare of children, families, and staff involved in early education. (Some questions are necessary precursors to dealing with more significant ones.) When formulating questions to address, we should also consider: (a) the view of childhood our position and action proposals represent as well as the views of opposing positions, (b) the possible delimitations or disclaimers for our position as well as for opposing positions, and (c) the real and/or possible effects and side-effects of our advocated actions as well as the effects and side-effects of action alternatives.

How can plausible arguments be developed?

Specific strategies for justifying or clarifying a point of view or position on an issue include: (a) elaborating terms or making distinctions, (b) citing authoritative (expert) definitions or opinions, (c) describing observational or clinical evidence such as personal experiences, anecdotes from others, or case study examples, (d) describing and evaluating empirical evidence such as research or evaluation results, (f) using an analogy or example of a comparable situation, (g) calling for logical reasoning, and (h) appealing to common sense, common experience or common emotions (Oliver & Newmann, 1969).

For example, an issue can be approached with logical reasoning. In this case, arguments based on relationships between propositions are prepared. Consider the following argument:

> With an increase in the number of single, working mothers with preschool children, the demand for day care services is increasing. If these preschool mothers cannot find adequate and affordable day care services, they can be neither productive workers nor effective parents. Therefore, the government should provide tax credit for building day care facilities and purchasing equipment in areas that serve low-income families and should refund the current tax credit for child care to low-income families using day care who otherwise might not benefit from this income tax credit. (H.R. 5966, 1982)

When both the propositions and the relationships have been verified, this type of argument can be very convincing.

When addressing an issue, use of an analogy can also be very persuasive. In the case of the issue "Should the state regulate day care homes in the same way it regulates day care centers?" the following analogy might be used:

> Let's consider Mrs. Conway who runs a day care home for neighborhood children. Now suppose Mrs. Conway instead were sewing clothing for others in her home. You probably wouldn't say that the same regulations should apply to her as apply to the local clothing manufacturing firm. Likewise, it can be said that the state should not regulate Mrs. Conway's day care home through licensing as it does day care centers.

Appealing to your audience's concerns, common experiences, and emotions sometimes can sway their opinion dramatically. Melton (1983) reports an incident about a conservative senator who became an adoption advocate when a lobbyist admired family pictures in his office and then shared pictures of her large family, including adopted children, and discussed the problems of supporting them without public subsidy.

Research and evaluation data and expert opinion often are used selectively by policy-makers and advocates to advance their positions (Forgione, 1980). For example, initiation of legislation for the Head Start program relied on the work of Hunt and Bloom (Melton, 1983). Likewise, debate arguments can be bolstered by reference to research, evaluation, and expert opinion.

The framework presented here will not eliminate challenges, but it can help us to predict them. With practice in debating and increased knowledge of issues, we can clarify our values and make better decisions about issues and policies that affect early education practice.

Guidelines for Orchestrating an Informal Debate

To assist students in preparing for presenting an informal debate, the following guidelines are provided (Freeley, 1976; Guliano, 1985; Williamson-Ige, 1984; Windes & O'Neil, 1964; Ziegelmueller & Dause, 1975).

How can teams prepare for an informal debate?

1. Select an issue and develop a debate question.
2. Set up two teams (2-3 people on each team). One team will take the pro-side of the debate question and the other side the con-side.
3. Research relevant journal/magazine articles, books, ERIC documents, and government documents published within the last 10 years.
   a. Visit the library and learn how to find information using various resources, e.g., card catalogue, CIJE, Resources in Education (ERIC), and government document files.
   b. Search for relevant, specific, and credible evidence (i.e., expert definitions, expert opinion, statistics, research findings, evaluation findings, testimony, and case descriptions) to support key arguments/propositions.
   c. Record complete bibliographic information and evidence entries on note cards.
4. Each team gathers or develops personal experience examples and analogies related to key arguments/propositions.
5. Each team organizes arguments and propositions in terms of:
   a. significance of the issue for early education (need)
   b. definitions of key concepts

c. child advocacy actions or early childhood programs/services that have been initiated (plan)

d. child advocacy actions or early childhood programs/services that could be initiated (plan)

e. conclusions about the merit of various view points, actions, programs, or services (advantages vs. disadvantages or evidence of adequacy vs. inadequacy)

6. Each team writes a brief introductory statement, 4-5 challenge questions, a brief summary statement and a reference list.

What is the format of the informal debate?

1. The instructor serves as moderator and timekeeper.
2. Each team takes 3 minutes to present their introductory statements.
3. For the next 20 minutes, the teams take turns asking each other challenge questions.
4. During the next 25 minutes, the moderator solicits comments and questions from the audience.
5. Finally, each team is allowed 2 minutes to sum up and conclude their arguments.
6. Afterwards, each audience member responds to the debate practices questionnaire. (See Appendix B for the debate questionnaire used during the debates.)
7. From process notes and submitted materials, the instructor later analyzes and evaluates the performance of individual team members and records audience contributions.

What strategies are helpful during delivery of a debate?

1. Maintain eye contact (do not bury your head and read from note cards); try to convince the audience of your point of view; be animated.
2. Use your 3-minute introduction as a springboard.
3. Address the significance of the issue for early education in your introduction and/or summary.

4. While listening to the other team, take notes for possible follow-up or rebuttal statements.
5. Repetition of key points during the debate can be persuasive. Display of visual aids (containing a limited amount of print) can be effective for this purpose.

Further Steps: Possible Strategies and Activities

Following their involvement in issue debates, students have engaged in a variety of activities including advocacy letter writing, advocacy workshops, advocacy interviews, listening to advocacy speakers, advocacy displays at professional conferences, advocacy position papers, and lobbying. Additional examples of advocacy training activities from other sources (Whitebook & Ginsburg, 1984; Fink & Sponseller, 1977) to extend students' learnings can be found in Appendices C and D.

Summary

The debate process presented here is an effort to encourage students to "find their own answers" to today's issues and to meet the challenge of incorporating advocacy training into teacher education. In these days of calling for reform in teacher education, we might keep in mind the words of Millie Almy: "Teacher educators who advocate more actively for other workers in early education advocate for themselves." (1985, p. 11) By seeking to develop advocacy knowledge and competencies in our students, we--as teacher educators--are helping to develop a professionally articulate community of early childhood educators.

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Table 1

Summary of Data From
Child Advocacy Questionnaire

Why should I become involved in child advocacy at the local, state, and/or national levels?

Concern for The Child and the Child's Needs	A Professional Obligation	To Improve the Status of Education	Other
10	7	2	1

If I were a teacher of young children today, why would I be reluctant to become involved in child advocacy efforts?

Anticipated Ineffectiveness	Time-Consuming	Other
9	6	4

What hurdles, if any, would be most difficult, if not impossible, for me to overcome?

Self-Assurance and Being Taken Seriously	Other	No Response
10	3	2

To become a successful child advocate for legislative or administrative action, how do I need to change?

More Self-Confident and Determined	More Politically Aware	Other
10	7	2

To become a successful child advocate for legislative or administrative action, what do I need to be able to do?

Communicate Effectively	Be Knowledgeable	Be Determined
13	3	2

To become a successful child advocate for legislative or administrative action, what do I need to know?

Knowledge of Current Issues	Knowledge of Advocacy Methods	Knowledge of the Political System
7	6	5

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Appendix A

CHILD ADVOCACY QUESTIONNAIRE

Why should I become involved in child advocacy at the local, state, and/or national levels?

If I were a teacher of young children today, why would I be reluctant to become involved in child advocacy efforts?

What hurdles, if any, would be most difficult, if not impossible, for me to overcome?

To become a successful child advocate for legislative or administrative action:

1. How do I need to change?

2. What do I need to be able to do?

3. What do I need to know?

Please respond to this short follow-up questionnaire to let us know how you feel about our debate. Just mark an X on the line which best expresses your opinion regarding each statement.

Team Members: _____

_____

_____

Topic (Viewpoint Argued):

_____

_____

	SUPERIOR	STRONG	AVERAGE	WEAK	UNSATISFACTORY
1. Arguments: Major arguments/ propositions clearly stated. Relationships drawn between evidence, arguments, and propositions. Organized.					
2. Supporting Material: Variety of examples/ testimony, statistics, expert opinion/definitions, comparisons/analogies, and visual aids. Appropriate, relevant, and credible evidence. Sufficient evidence.					
3. Strategies to Persuade: Adjustment/responsiveness to audience comments/questions. Balanced use of logical, emotional, and ethical appeals.					
4. Delivery: Effective voice quality. Eye contact. Gestures. Posture.					
5. Tone of Argumentation: Positive attitude toward self and other team. Orderly, courteous, and fair.					
6. Overall Rating:					

Comments:

Team Members: _____

_____

_____

Topic (Viewpoint Argued):

_____

_____

	SUPERIOR	STRONG	AVERAGE	WEAK	UNSATISFACTORY
1. Arguments: Major arguments/ propositions clearly stated. Relationships drawn between evidence, arguments, and propositions. Organized.					
2. Supporting Material: Variety of examples/ testimony, statistics, expert opinion/definitions, comparisons/analogies, and visual aids. Appropriate, relevant, and credible evidence. Sufficient evidence.					
3. Strategies to Persuade: Adjustment/responsiveness to audience comments/questions. Balanced use of logical, emotional, and ethical appeals.					
4. Delivery: Effective voice quality. Eye contact. Gestures. Posture.					
5. Tone of Argumentation: Positive attitude toward self and other team. Orderly, courteous, and fair.					
6. Overall Rating:					

Comments:

	SA	A	D	SD	NA
1. This activity made me think about points that I had not considered before.					
2. My position on this issue most resembles that of Team 1.					

SA: Strongly Agree
A: Agree
D: Disagree
SD: Strongly Disagree
NA: No Answer or Can't Decide

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Appendix B
Debate Questionnaire